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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were to discover whether teachers can report the ways in which books, stories, poems, or articles have changed their concepts, attitudes, or behavior in relation to reading instruction, to learn the kinds of reading materials which have influenced their reading instruction, and to ascertain the instructional areas which were influenced. An introspective questionnaire was given to 97 teachers, the majority of whom were primary-level teachers, involved in a two-day conference on reading cues to creativity. Of these teachers, only 17% reported no professional influence from reading. The majority of the other 83% were more influenced by books than by periodicals in their instructional methodology, and more young teachers reported being influenced by reading than did older teachers. The seven materials mentioned most frequently were, in order: "Teacher" by Sylvia Ashton-Warner, "Teacher" (periodical), "Instructor" (periodical), "The Reading Teacher" (periodical), "The Naked Children" by Daniel Fader, "Schools without Failure" by William Glasser, "Summerhill" by A.S. Neill, and "Talking Time" by Louise B. Scott and J. J. Thompson. (JM)

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PROFESSIONAL VALUES FROM READING: THE INFLUENCE OF READING ON THE INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY OF TEACHERS

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PROFESSIONAL VALUES FROM READING: THE INFLUENCE OF READING ON THE INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY OF TEACHERS

FEHL L. SHIRLEY

The value of reading in the professional lives of teachers is questioned. Indeed, the role of reading in the lives and experiences of the average American adult is not encouraging. In January, 1971, only 26 percent of an adult sampling reported reading a book in the last 30 days. Television sets still outrank newspapers in circulation per one thousand inhabitants (Mueller, 1973). It would seem that the values derived from sustained reading are ignored or thrust aside in favor of more immediate and effortless feedback form the media.

However, prominent educators of the past have reported introspectively how literature had contributed to their professional lives. For Bertrand Russell, the four principles for the objective testing of any opinion or theory proposed by Descartes had value:

> The second and third especially -- divide difficulties into as many parts as possible and proceed from simple to complex -- I personally have found it always necessary to insist upon with advanced students who were beginning research. Unless they were very able they tended to take vast problems far beyond their powers, and I find Descartes' rules exactly what one has to tell them
>
> (Downs, 1961:70)

The influence of the writings of Thomas Aquinas on Maritain's vocation as philosopher was sustained over a long period of time:

> I felt, as it were, an illumination of the reason. My vocation as philosopher became clear to me. . . And through thirty years of work and combat I have followed in this path, with a feeling that I could understand more completely the gropings, the discoveries, and the travail of modern thought, as I tried to throw upon them more of the light which comes to us from a wisdom which, resisting the fluctuations of time, has been worked out through the centuries (Fadiman, 1939:197-198).

Therefore, reading had given these professional leaders insights into the course and direction of their vocational pursuits.

What about the reading attitudes and habits of perservice and inservice teachers? Are teachers readers? Do teachers value reading? Has reading helped teachers in their instructional methodology? We have assumed that "behind every child who becomes a reader is a teacher who is a reader" (Tinker and McCullough, 1962:20). Studies of the reading habits of preservice and inservice teachers by Odland-Ilstrup (1963), Hawkins (1967), Duffey (1973), and Mueller (1973) have generally not been flattering. Evidently, reading was valued mildly in the professional and personal lives of the teachers of these investigations. The point was made by Mueller that teachers should clarify their values concerning reading. If a teacher viewed reading as a tool for reading directions, passing examinations or surveying magazines, then he/she would probably stress the skill aspects of the reading process. If a teacher read only what was required, he/she might empathize more with reluctant readers.

The Problem

Since teachers need opportunities to develop insight into their reading habits and the influence of reading in their professional lives, the present study was made on the reported

impact of reading on the instructional methodology of teachers in the teaching of reading. The purposes of the study were to ascertain (1) if teachers can report ways in which books, stories, poems or articles have changed their concepts, attitudes or behavior in regard to reading instruction, (2) the kinds of reading materials that reportedly influenced teachers in their instructional methodology in reading, and (3) the areas of influence in reading instructional methodology reported by the teachers of this study.

The Procedure

Ninety-seven teachers who participated in a two-day conference for university credit on "Reading Cues to Creativity" at California State University, Northridge, October 1975, were asked to respond to an introspective questionnaire, giving the following information:

> Think of the book, stories, poems or articles you have read. Do you definitely remember any that changed your point of view, your attitude or behavior toward reading instruction? (Give the title and author, if possible. If you do not remember, describe the material.) Tell exactly how these books, poems or articles affected your attitude -- tendency to act in a certain way -- your ideas or behavior in teaching reading. What were your ideas about reading instruction before your reading? After your reading? What did you do before reading this material? What specific part of the reading influenced your teaching of reading -- a line, a phrase, a case study, statistics, specific ideas or anything else?

Of the total respondents, 62 were primary teachers, 16 were intermediate grade teachers, 12 were junior and senior high teachers, and 17 held miscellaneous positions (resource teachers, special education teachers, reading specialists, student teachers, a hospital teacher, and undesignated).

Analysis of the Questionnaires

Of the total 97 respondents to the questionnaire, 83 percent reported that reading had influenced their reading instructional methodology, and 17 percent reported no professional influence from reading.

The youngest teachers tended to report more total readings that had influenced their instructional methodology. The mean numbers of readings for the four age groups were: 20-30 years -- 2.2; 31-40 years -- 2.0; 41-50 years -- 1.7; and 51-60 years -- 1.4. The 31-40 age group tended to report more books of influence; the 20-30 group more periodicals of influence. In Cogan and Anderson's study (1977) of the professional periodicals most commonly read by elementary school teachers, it was found that the 20-30 group did not read professional periodicals as frequently as their older colleagues. However, all age groups were influenced more by books than periodicals. Slightly over three-fourths, or 77 percent, of the readings mentioned were books and 23 percent were periodicals. It would appear that the teachers of this study were more influenced in their instructional methodology by books than periodicals.

The seven reading materials mentioned more frequently, in order, were: Teacher by Sylvia-Ashton Warner, Teacher (periodical), Instructor (periodical), The Reading Teacher (periodical), The Naked Children by Daniel Fader, Schools Without Failure by William Glasser, Summerhill by A. S. Neill, and Talking Time by Scott and Thompson. A large number of books were mentioned only once. It is interesting to note that the periodicals, Teacher and Instructor, were also high on the readership list in Cogan and Anderson's study of professional periodicals read by elementary school teachers.

Areas of Influence

From a content analysis of the responses to the questionnaire, six major reading instructional areas in which the teachers were influenced by their reading emerged: approaches to and methods of teaching reading, attitude toward students, techniques in teaching reading, classroom organization of reading programs, utilizing reading materials, and the use of volunteers and paraprofessionals. Following are a few illustrative comments from the teachers:

APPROACHES TO AND METHODS OF TEACHING READING (Teacher, Sylvia-Ashton Warner) I have utilized her approach in my classroom for the past four years (since it was introduced to me by a fellow student teacher). Teacher has greatly changed my teaching of reading in the classroom. . . 'the organic approach' has enabled me to meet the individual needs of my children. A child comes to school with a range of experiences; during school he will be highly motivated by that which interests him. The organic approach fulfills this need.

(The Naked Children, Daniel Fader) I hadn't thought about letting kids read magazines and newspapers during class time instead of textbooks.

(Teacher, Sylvia-Ashton Warner; The Open Classroom Reader, Charles Silberman; Teaching Young Children to Read, Dolores Durkin; Teaching in the British Primary School, Vincent Rogers; Reading Reading, Peter L. Spencer). All of these books view reading as an interdisciplinary skill rather than a skill apart from the rest of the curriculum. All view the child's experiences as the source of 'reading material'. Durkin stated that early ('self taught') readers in her California study, wrote first, then read, again emphasizing the interrelationship of skills.

(Individualized Instruction, Madeline Hunter) . . from Madeline Hunter's writings, I have gained insight into the importance of diagnostic-prescriptive teaching. It wastes my time and the child's to teach him something he already knows.

ATTITUDE TOWARD STUDENTS (Individualized Instruction---Every Child a Winner, Gertrude Noar) 'Each individual is a winner in his own right while he learns.' Each child should be praised for what he can do, not degraded for being 'below grade level'. Personal evaluations from the teacher and peers help each child feel that he is an important contributing member of the class. When the children are continually told that they are successful, they will be successful.

(The Geranium on the Window Sill Just Died But Teacher You Went Right On, Albert Cullum) This book gave a very exaggerated viewpoint of how a child views a teacher. It had a great bearing on my perception of the child as an individual. That has affected many assets of my room, including my

outlook toward reading. I have been striving to incorporate a more individual outlook in my reading program and my approach with the children reading in my class. I feel I have been able to relax with my children and their reading.

> What is my place in your puzzle, teach?
> Do I fit?
> Or am I one piece too many?
> Tell me for real, teach!
> I know there's no room for me on your bulletin board,
> But do I have a place in your puzzle?

TECHNIQUES IN TEACHING READING (Talking Time, Louise B. Scott and J. J. Thompson) In Kindergarten we emphasize beginning and rhyming sounds. The stories and poems in Talking Time are outstanding in this respect. I've used material from this book in making tapes for my learning centers.

(Understanding Reading and Psycholinguistics and Reading, Frank Smith) . . . Instead of relying so heavily on a phonics approach, I now present vocabulary in charted story form and do much more reading aloud to the children, from poetry to fairy tales to adventure stories . . .

CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION OF READING PROGRAMS ("The Dangers of Early Schooling", Harper's Magazine, July, 1972). "An Agony of Learning," Life, October 6, 1972) Reading the Life and Harper articles helped keep my mind open and set me on a path leading to the organizing of a 'Pre-1st' at our school. Set up four years ago, it has proven an asset and has given the not quite ready, immature but capable, ex-kindergarteners an extra year in a small group (18 max.) individualized perception and language experience oriented program.

(The Open Classroom, Herbert Kohl; Born to Love, Muriel James; Summerhill, A. Neill; Reality Therapy, William Glasser) Before reading these books, I was more autocratic than necessary. I would decide what the class would do at independent activity time, and the classroom would always be fairly quiet. After reading this material, I let the children be involved in making decisions about what they would like to do and stories they would like me to read. I want to give them more freedom to express themselves and interact with others, and not be too concerned if it is a noisy classroom. I am learning to work in a more creative way, to become less authoritarian.

UTILIZING READING MATERIALS (The Naked Children, Daniel Fader) Before reading Fader's Naked Children, I believed that only reading materials published by educational publishing companies or well known books should be in the classroom. Only basal readers or other 'traditional' materials were utilized in my classroom. Today, however, I encourage children to share varied types of reading materials -- i.e., racing magazines, books from home, comic books, Sunday comics, even baseball cards -- and more recently, monster and movie cards.

THE USE OF VOLUNTEERS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS (Book Review by Donald G. Emery, Teach Your Preschooler to Read, in Ms; "Can Parents Teach Reading?" in Psychology Today, October, 1975) His (Donald G. Emery) contention is that unless you want your child to have a 25% chance of failure you better teach him to read yourself, on a one-to-one basis by age 4. As a teacher of first grade and parent of a four year old, I felt the need to involve the parents more at my own school and push at my son's pre-school to have him moved to a Kindergarten class where reading is approached . . . That teaching reading could be done sometimes better by peer tutors, mothers, etc. than myself.

TABLE 1

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES IN READING INSTRUCTIONAL AREAS INFLUENCED BY READING

(N = 103)

READING INSTRUCTIONAL AREA INFLUENCED BY READING	NUMBER	% IN CATEGORY	% OF TOTAL
APPROACHES TO AND METHODS OF TEACHING READING			
Total	34		33.00
Language Experience	18	52.94	
Individualized Reading	9	26.47	
Eclectic Approach	3	8.82	
Interdisciplinary Approach	2	5.88	
Creative Approach	1	2.94	
Diagnostic-Prescriptive	1	2.94	
ATTITUDE TOWARD STUDENTS			
Total	26		25.24
TECHNIQUES IN TEACHING READING			
Total	21		20.39
Using Contextual Clues	4	19.48	
Reading Aloud to Students	3	14.28	
Teaching Comprehension Skills	3	14.28	
Teaching Linguistically-Different Learners	2	9.52	
Teaching Phonic Analysis	2	9.52	
Using Audio Tapes to Record Literature	1	4.76	
Teaching Reading in the Content Areas	1	4.76	
Progressing from Simple to More Complex Tasks	1	4.76	
Teaching Listening Skills	1	4.76	
Teaching Auditory and Visual Discrimination	1	4.76	
Using Rewards	1	4.76	
Using Learning Centers	1	4.76	

READING INSTRUCTIONAL AREA INFLUENCED BY READING	NUMBER	% IN CATEGORY	% OF TOTAL
CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION OF READING PROGRAMS			
Total	11		10.68
Using More Open Structures	6	54.55	
General Organization	3	27.27	
Using More Structure	1	9.09	
Setting Reachable Goals	1	9.09	
UTILIZING READING MATERIALS			
Total	9		8.74
USE OF VOLUNTEERS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS			
Total	2		1.95
Parent Aides	1	50.00	
Peer Tutors	1	50.00	

The distribution of responses in reading instructional areas of influence is shown in Table 1. The largest area of influence reported was approaches to and methods of teaching reading; thirty-three percent of the readings emerged in this area. The language experience approach was mentioned most frequently. The fact that the luncheon speaker at the conference was Dr. R. Van Allen, who had written extensively on the subject of language experience, might have skewed the results. However, a variety of materials was mentioned in regard to language experience, particularly Teacher by Sylvia-Ashton Warner.

In the second area, attitude toward students, the responses showed an improved attitude and a sensitivity to students' needs. Twenty-five percent of the responses were in this area.

A variety of responses was reported in the third area, techniques in teaching reading, with contextual analysis, reading aloud to students, and teaching comprehension skills mentioned most frequently; twenty percent of the responses were reported in this area.

The fourth area, classroom organization of reading programs, included eleven percent of the total responses. The predominant influence from reading appeared to be using more open structures. Teachers reported that readings encouraged them to reorganize their classrooms to give students more freedom to express themselves and make decisions.

Nine percent of the responses were reported in the fifth area, utilizing reading materials. Most teachers influenced in this area reported that their readings had stimulated them to provide a variety of materials in the classroom to meet the varying interests and needs of students.

Only two percent of the responses fell in the last area, use of volunteers and paraprofessionals. In this area of influence, the importance of using parents and student tutors in early reading programs was stressed.

Summary of Findings

Eighty-three percent of the teachers of this study reported that reading had influenced their professional development, and 17 percent reported no professional influence from reading. The majority of the teachers were more influenced by books than by periodicals in their instructional methodology. The teachers in the youngest age group (20-30) tended to report more total readings of influence than their older colleagues. Six instructional areas influenced by reading, in order of frequency, emerged from a

content analysis of the responses: approaches to and methods of teaching reading, attitude towards students, techniques in teaching reading, classroom organization of reading programs, utilizing reading materials, and the use of volunteers and paraprofessionals. A wide variety of books, stories, poems and aritcles from textbooks to mysteries reportedly influenced the teachers of this study.

Implications

1. An introspective questionnaire, similar to the one used in this investigation, might be utilized by instructors of preservice and inservice reading methods classes to help teachers gain insight into ways reading had furthered their professional development; teachers might realize the possibilities of enriched reading for professional growth.
2. A wide variety of reading materials might be used in reading methods classes. One teacher gave a comment of appreciation for including The Naked Children by Daniel Fader in a book list distributed by an instructor of a reading methods course:

   > The book was written like a novel. He (Daniel Fader) did describe case studies but only as character development. It was more interesting reading than straight statistics.

3. Case studies should be made of the influence of reading on the instructional methodology of teachers, and a comparison drawn of those teachers maximally and minimally influenced.

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